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Bard

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A break in the weather
as kind of meaning
few hours will be over freezing
for the first time in weeks
what will Iago make
of this tepid opportunity?

Septentrio the north
its horses winds and crystals
ice compass needle
brave discourse tough skin
then something else happens
birds on a phone line

string sparrow perches through our cities
like the Sabbath-limit lines
used to snake through Brownsville
in my day, a disaster
of geography, the world
turned inside out

just long enough to remember
how the Tweets read up
from the bottom of the screen
as if language is always
climbing to heaven through streets
that feel like your hands

device take off
is it a shirt or a plane
a woman dressed as a tongue
silent in the auditorium
but in Russia only men may speak
in all this hurry no room for change

for I was a token in a change purse
back when there were coins
I took people where they need to go
I was a word and you listened
a ballgame at twilight
what is the purpose of your sport

it is to break the circle of the world
madame, it is to come home
but where have you silly boys been
to need such iffy symbolism
not a symbol, a hard thing in your hand
but the mother thing was silent

we know that to understand a game
is to play it no longer
dying chessmen weltering on the sand
and a tide reluctant to come in
I own the weather
I am what you do in your dark

because I am hollow
I must suffer in and on my skin
all the griefs of body life
this miracle of seeming
Adam creates God on the Sixtine ceiling
every stick has two ends

all color all skin and in the dark o Lady
where the mechanical raptures
cruise down Bronx avenues
looking for a night that never comes
once you turn the light on
it stays lit forever

the little ring I gave your ancient hand
chrysoprase and sardonyx
gold wire wrought to tree branch
holding the stones like fruit
to a winter god like today
my hands are cold to tell you this

monk I am and all the world a monastery
rough the paper with my thumb the ink
seeps a little thickening the meaning
spill your morning coffee on the snow
this mark is all marks
any real symbol means all the rest

**for we live by implication and cheap food
we kill to eat and eat our way to dying
or so the pandits tell us word by word
o Christ the stuff we dare to listen to!
when all we need is the wind abaft
and the ice crackling underfoot**

**Christ's other brother went the furthest west
and set up there in dolmens by the sea
an alternate energy to bring the Spirit down
from heaven and up from the hidden earth
to speak a new word breath by breath
until all of Europe heard it**

**but didn't know what they heard
so came on foot for a thousand miles
to hear what the sea was saying
for those Christs invented the ocean
before that was a scary mystery
the way an old house is you lived in once**

and where do we live now
among the unspeakable evidence all round
of what had been ours now we are no one
and Xu in prison for fifty months
for commenting on the drift of government
how can wise men live day to day

no one trusts us and we trust no one
is the everlasting motto of the rose
I am beautiful because I am
and soon will not be
and what do you have to say for yourself
captain of many an absent war

while pains of this abstract peace renew
o soothe me with your alphabets
sisterhood of signs o sweep my floor clean
brotherhood of ancient instruments
as slim Rameau might once have caused to tune
in candlelit preparations for orderly *ecstase*

opera or wishing glass or pool that spells
tone by tone the message of the stars
as creepy old astrologers proclaimed
this means you and you mean this
and all the while the red light held
the panting lovers motionless from home

alabaster wreath of clouds! he cried
that I remember when all the names are gone
forget them anyhow
they only work when you cry them out
straining your throat on the hillside
and the only answer surges in your gut

is it always winter where you are
how come your breath is always warm
how come the churchbells ring all night long
you always come to me with a simple question
it takes my whole life to unravel
and by then the child has come and gone

as if it were only a matter of beginning
a little thing, the imaginary atom say
which is really just a locus of behavior
energies convolving in a brisk of being
temporary identity of river marl
and all the rubies of the Irrawaddy

welcome, storm cloud, we are drenched
with reminiscence, what else
could a classic be but norm remembered
almost automatic the way we love and kill
don't blame Homer he sang for love and supper
blame the schools that inculcate his bronze

because metal is the thing that hurts
four thousand years of it refining
swifter ways of delivering that pain
Iago broods about his lost loves, lost
to those who act out their desires
whereas he can only cantilate his grief

**fear bottomless despair of someone
who saw the sea once and failed it
turned his back and strutted safe away
into the darkness of common life
scorning these upstart heroes with high C's
*I believe in a cruel god who does not believe in me***

**man with a mutilated soul
the sea does that when you try to escape
your knights and turrets drowned in surf scum
it hurts like the thought of tomorrow
Magdalen forgive my imprecisions
I have to believe any real person is really you**

**I thought all this while was pure number
but there is something worse than ignorance
a dead bluejay in the snow a sign of it
something worse than war
a poem glorifying it
something worse than death an unspent life**

Iago is the common man an everybody
dressed like nobody his skin is resentment
his core is fear forgive him as you forgive yourself
making trouble is the only thing he can make
pity the ineptness that sings its way to tragedy
everybody loses that's the point of it

Iago is rational he chooses what hurts others
to drown out what hurts him and that
he never knows, mind and no soul,
soul and no spirit, gall and no skin,
we don't know what we are at last
we are Iago mostly and glad to die

get it over with whatever it was
clouds come up the sky sometimes it rains
sometimes deer come in from the woods
a kind woman feeds them and for an hour
there is quiet in Eden and no thought
mind as lucid as the clear sky after

but after that no matter, the letter
comes in from India the Southern Kingdom
the People's Thing of China the waves
on every earthly beach defiled by beauty
and transcendence, the lobster pot
broken on the slimy rocks I love you

as everybody says to everybody
meaning it all too true the rocks
are wet continually with coming and going
how can a mineral sleep its ears
are everywhere it has no eyes
so can see everything by touch alone

of course you love me I can listen
and when you learn to listen I will
love you too like a railroad train
running round the Christmas tree
on little tracks over cotton snow
past a little mirror pond your hand

**on the switch and always in control
why are we waiting for the pilgrims
to come home they never will
Compostela is further than Mecca
further than Kailas the moon is nearer
the sun is right in your pocket**

**and here you thought it was just chess
or theology or some innocent ,misprision
like a fender-bender on Fordham Road
who cares what you think just drink your tea
Oolong means Black Dragon just like me
juice of ginger root and fresh turmeric**

**whereby you have enough to pray
incense for puja and a beast to ride
or could it be your spiritual bride
phantom bridegroom of so many words
just means a man just means a slow
dance at the approach of twilight.**

and before you know it it's night
dead night and the freight cars
idling on the siding Barrytown in '64
cover the panting in the old Merc
my god why would it be with a woman
like that who wept all night

but there were jewels in the gravel
water between the ties collected
tadpoles and stick insects in moonlight
who knew such people walked the dark
I thought we were the only dragons here
soaking our cigarettes in laudanum and

never mind spirit the soul is meat enough
for all our living, spend twenty seconds
under anesthesia my life is changed forever
because time is a compromise time is
really our friend time gives us time
to notice and savor and to change

(27 January 2014)

We go in and go out freely evenings most mornings or
what makes it a garden, we grow there
and are grown, Eden, Gan Eden,
it is the other dreamland, the one
we sleep to enter, not this we wake to find.

Or it would be Eden if I could
night and day the gates lie open
and the glow of your own skin
is adequate to light the way
through this deep-sunken highway
you must come—*no other way* to Eden

or anywhere else where dreams half-free
half frozen in the midnight air
lie around you babbling meek images
you have to learn to energize
with spittle and with sperm, the oil
of Lucifer sweating on your brow

and all that romance busy in the dark
forgive me for slipping back into
a century or two along the past's
half-sunken highway to a crossroad
beneath a barren gibbet and a voice
unseen lifted in the fields nearby

o my mushrooms o my cauliflowers
is there any food that does not milk the mind
so that strange visions totter down the light
o lettuce and the cheese-rind biomes
how can we live if everything's alive
the empty noose swinging in the breeze

and lo! I saw the moon caught in its loop
so that for once the sky and earth
were tied together and it was safe to sleep
for normally the atmosphere is narrative
and all its nitrogen explodes in imagery
inside our half-baked longings lost in dream

any open window waits in kindness

**mother's eye forgiving weeping child
for I did every wrong there was
I killed the seagull I puffed an ill-wind
into the mainsail of the doomed ship
all nightmares I saddle in my stable**

***what is thy name?* though she keeps singing
the loveliest the lost know how to hear
voice on high asking the lowest question
almost you know it the answer don't you
the time is right *no other way to come*
or go this is the forest of all your forgetting**

**when things fall they are the sky
upon us when thing rise up they are the sun
and the rivers of Eden flow from your lips
laps liberties liquidambar all the orient
arched over us as human arête
transhuman anatomy that bright shade**

someday it will be different beast
the wolf will talk the woman bear her child
in a crystal goblet in the moonlight live
and it will be all hers half yours and so
the pine trees tremble in the wind
I can't feel down here for all my lust

despite the liminal the ground gives way
a doorsill open on the Adriatic
I saw once through September fog
all the animals are people don't you know that
even yet after the opera house exploded
and daunted Europe with a final melody

Gesamtkunstwerk we'll never escape
the tune like smoke pursues us
through the keyhole where the ghosts come in
keep an iron key there at all times
witches hate the cold of iron love the kiss of air
I came to my love under her locked door

(28 January 2014)

as if a word were there to give
against the sun glare a fin rising
from the sheen all your hopes are on it
following where it slices forward into
too bright to be seen the *natural way*
only you're exhausted only thinking stops

standing alone the way an eagle
falls down to its prey o felix culpa
for every meal is made of sin
and if we lived in truth we'd live
on air if that and dream hard stone
blue lapis and pellucid sea

for I am water mostly when I take your hand
leave me on you when I slip away
the way we belong to each other
mackerel-crowded mitred-bishop synod
jabbering the imperfections of the truth
while all the while the quiet mind

**and nothing more, your eyes this noontime
stayed with me all day and that alone
is ancient Ægypt telling me the truth
the line of haunch the lion sphinxing
the line of light runs through the stone
a mouth to swallow all the vagrant years**

**just tell me what your body thinks
and that's Derrida enough for me
and all the online lexicons rehearse
the quick toss of one woman's amber hair
then the opera's done the folk song folds
back into the people they don't sing anymore**

(29 January 2014)

and give the walled garden room
for those peaches — Persia's — to ooze
summer sap along the trysting bench
loops void around the tree, no lovers more
the bench an empty theater but the tree
still fluent amber juice of Samarkand

as if Shelley were your gaudy sister
and Byron your wicked aunt, don't know,
never read enough to tell celestial
from garden dirt, I bowed my head
deep within an antique book
its letters all dark-graved and latine

wasn't it enough to be a child forever
2 below sun in tree tops already glancing
bracket the language of theory let song insist
knew you when you still were thinking
now I dip my pen in tea to write
a skinny wobble on an absent page

last night I dreamed a lucid lecture
I was giving a young candidate to teach
with titanium logic brought him to understand
the only goal of teaching is give pleasure
how to take pleasure from the things you do
how to turn observation into ecstasy

thæt wæs true dream I reckon
Saxon in the morning and Celt at night
meet my old friends the words there
wind a sentence round the bobbin
then let it loose, see who hears it
in yene velt the other world behind the light

voice from the closet warm hand on your back
fingertips trace the paths of splendor
down the ever-branching habits of the Holy Tree
your body, that world comes into this
among the pilgrim miracles we are
our green language made the green sea

or is there always waiting to be done
if this word keeps saying long enough
the sparrows will come back and peck their seed
who hide in bitter cold an instant hibernate
wake to their warmer though to us still cold
and who are us this morning you sweet young nun

all sunny disposition and white bib a cross thereon
seems made of fire and your gentle eyes
catch some of that incendiary calm
the fire lit before the world was made, a word
is what it looks like now, you hear
its colors in your darkest certainty

andropogon seems to be the genus
man-beard but why call *that* patchouli
when woman-whisker makes the best of scent
but they rose up despondent at his coarseness
stormed out of bio lab and drank Fiji water
for anything is possible in education

**even the worst teacher knows something you don't know
a glass of feeble substitute toast smeared with ovaltine
and yet the morning still comes tripping out of dawn
with all the living children of the night
yapping and baying at you in the form of words
and every little word has you in mind**

**since the source is always near to hand
Desdemona's handkerchief the bitten apple core
jealousy needs no evidence but thought
but what is that to me I am no Moor no Hispaniol
I live between the lines of all his plays
I am the heart never happened**

**or maybe I'm the moon on autumn nights
twinkling around Ophelia as she floats
for I can count my flowers too, every digit
is one blossom on an infinite tree
count me till I come to you in dream
whispering barbaric names to guide you home**

(30 January 2014)

there is fear and time to be afraid
is not a fragrant handkerchief or sleeve
dangled before a doting spaniel evidence
or could all anxiety be the furnace rumbling
combustion makes noise, the song of flame
and roaring in the heart your fear

could you lead music into fire
the flame would speak, be angel fire
maybe maybe and chant the fear away
or let a candle in a votive lamp
say your Ave's or your Mani's for you
would that calm your oppression, no,

to be awake at all is to be afraid
they call it vigilance cats have it
or stretch a flag over the sky fatherland
but all loyalty is fear and here I am
in winter complaining to no self
go light a candle and see what it says

my nefesh went out to that form but worry
 if it rushes out and never comes back
 but cleaves to the target of its *first impression*
 and lingers out there lost or with another
 so that which is the social me of me, my *outward*
 is lost from me and I am winter mere

(he means by *nefesh* appetitive soul
 he thinks he can lose it, then where will he be
 but drowning men never lose their lust for air)
 and we are drowning in a sea of necessity
nede hath no lawe says the *Lover's Confession*
 and "I will never walk through this door again"

the one I left out is Othello of course
 you hardly need him for the tragedy
 malevolence and innocence adequate
 together, just use his tender sturdy fingers
 then let all fall, now let her rise, a personmy
 of the mind and mind alone

my eyes are on all this from the seashore
the deer at browse beside me and a clam
forced by gull its house beside me
every story is a tragedy every song
a wolf howling in the forest, fire
sounds like water when you listen

it became clear to me later that a stone
heals itself in moonlight of those sicknesses
a stone —tourmaline obsidian jadeite— can
transmit to humans or a glass of milk
have you ever listened to one of those
carefully while your lips were busy at it

and what business have they not done
through all these eras of deduction and
in the homeland of the first Critique
some part of my mind a dozen years after
is still landing between the peaks
in Innsbruck gateway to the Romans

**can I be truer than you my skin
my moult my serpent mind my claw
uplifted to scribble with the clouds
your lipstick on my manuscript
my sixty-volume novel you have to read
because everything ever is in it twice-over

once for the goddess and once for the man**

(31 January 2014)